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ABSTRACT

The International Student Advisor Office (ISAO) provides a variety of services and activities aimed at assisting foreign students to adjust to their new environment. A portion of these activities and services is formalized in the Summer Orientation Program, which attempts to introduce students to life in the U.S. in general and the academic scene in particular. This document describes and discusses an Orientation Program held from July 25 to September 10, 1975. It was a component part of a joint program that included a separately administered Intensive English Language Program. Findings are that: (1) the goals of the program need to be more clearly defined to include the implication of adding participants who are not new arrivals; (2) the juxtaposition of this program with IEL places it in competition for the participants' time with the student opting for the acquisition of a knowledge of English over American culture; and (3) that the Home-Stay Program is seen as vital but desires and motives of the participants need reexamination. Attempts should be made to utilize, for communication purposes, natural groups that emerge from the students themselves. (Author/KE)

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Impact of an Orientation Program for Foreign Students

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Abstract

A description and evaluation of a summer Orientation Program sponsored by the International Student Advisors Office. It is suggested that the goals of the program be more clearly defined to include the implication of adding participants who are not new arrivals. In addition, the juxtaposition of this program with Intensive English instruction places it in competition for the participants' time with the student opting for the aquisition of a knowledge of English over American culture. The Home-Stay program is seen as vital but desires and motives of the participants need reexamination. Attempts should be made to utilize, for communication purposes, natural groups which emerge within the students themselves.

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Introduction

The International Student Advisor Office (ISAO) provides a variety of services and activities aimed at assisting foreign students to adjust to their new environment. A portion of these activities and services is formalized in Summer Orientation Programs, programatic attempts to introduce students to life in the U.S. in general and the academic scene in particular. The present report concerns itself with a description and discussion of an Orientation Program held from July 25 to September 10, 1975. It was a component part of a joint program which included a separately administered Intensive English Language Program (IEL), staffed through the Department of Linguistics.

The purpose of the research was to identify some problem areas met by students in the ISAO program, primarily in such activities as lectures, group discussions, and home-stays. It was carried out by persons trained in an anthropological mode of inquiry which included considerable participant observation. While our focus is upon the ISAO Orientation Program, we cannot escape the perspective of the student participant who sees the Programs as one and does not share the institution's perspective of a sharply divided dichotomy between the English and Orientation Programs. Reporting the students point of view about the Orientation Program necessitates, therefore, the inclusion of reference to the Intensive English Program experience.

From the onset in 1968 most of the participants in joint English/Orientation Programs have been individuals who have come to the U.S. to study in academic institutions, primarily the U of M or other area colleges. In the summer of 1975 the combined program took on new dimensions as it accepted three groups of students who differed from previous ones in several ways. Many were not new arrivals to the U.S. and their presence

in the U.S. was not necessarily focused on either entrance into a traditional U.S. academic program or a particular institution. In addition these groups were operating through a contractual party rather than through a personal agreement between the University's program and the individual. This report reflects the consequences that this change in student participants had and the implications for the program. Not only did the sheer number increase (from 45 in 1974 to 168 in 1975) with the attendant logistical problems, but student reaction was mixed, as attested by erratic attendance at some of the programs.

An immediate concern of ISAO was to find answers to the perplexing questions of low attendance in their orientation program. Their questions about this problem shaped the direction of our inquiry. By utilizing a flexible research style which included open-ended questions, we were able to document students' oral reponses to the program in greater detail than can be elicited in a survey using limited responses. This research style helped unravel some of the complexities of the hidden conflicts operating at different levels which were causing them to stay away from the ISAO program.

The research team included two anthropologists and two translators who had fluency in one of the major language groupings of the students and who were active participants in key aspects of the program. Much of the data comes from observations and interviews with informants in settings ranging from classes, dorms, off campus living units, and in activities in and outside the formal programs in what has been called a "snowball" sampling technique. In order to guard against the possible bias of such a method we selected a stratified sample of participants and made rigorous efforts to contact as many of these persons as possible for interviews. In addition to interviews with the students, formal interviews were held

with key members of the instructional staff and sponsoring agencies.

The authors are reluctant to label this report as "an evaluation" for several reasons. Although evaluation research has developed a variety of methodologies, too often it is perceived only as the use of protocols of closed end questions (usually in written form) administered to a sample of the population under scrutiny. In this case the heterogeneous nature of the participants with varying degrees of facility in English and acculturation made such techniques inoperable. It was only through the highly informal style of participant observation that we felt we could gain some insight into the issues involved. In addition as the research progressed it became apparent the problem we were asked to examine demanded a sociologically ordered explanation rather than a judgemental evaluation. To a large degree, then, the report is interpretatively descriptive.

Description of the Program

The resources of two separate departments of the University of Minnesota (each with separate programs and staffs) are drawn upon to construct the special six week package, the English and Orientation Program. During the summer period the separate programs coalesce in a loose federation with ISAO providing the necessary organizational and logistical coordination for the combined program. The Intensive English and Orientation Programs in a recognition that foreign students face problems in two areas of adjustment, those arising from "language" difficulties and those arising from "cultural" differences. The task of bringing the students' language level of proficiency up to a required standard so that they can participate in American life and pursue their various academic careers or training is the responsibility of the Department of Linguistics which during the summer held a seven week Intensive English Language program (IEL). The students participated in this component five hours a day, between 9:00 and 3:20 with fifteen minute breaks

between classes and ninety minutes for lunch.

Following this, between 3:30 and 4:45, the International Student Adviser Office (ISAO) held "orientation sessions" as part of their component aimed at facilitating the students' adjustment to American life and academic settings. This report, while recognizing areas of overlap and the joint responsibilities of the ISAO/IEL teams, focuses on the ISAO orientation activities, the "cultural" component. References to the IEL program are made only to emphasize their impact on ISAO Orientation activities as evidenced in our observations of student behavior and their responses to our questions.

In addition to these orientation lectures and presentations, ISAO arranged attendance at such extra-curricular activities as home stays, a weekend camp and social and cultural events bringing them into contact with Americans and the environment of the Twin Cities. A further ISAO Orientation responsibilty was that of functioning as advisors in a myriad of personal details centering around immigration and adjustment including finding suitable accommodations. These are aspects of the work which do not fall under the domain of the IEL staff. However, for the students the activities of IEL and Orientation are intertwined. The students' learning of English did not cease in the orientation activities, neither were the IEL exercises irrelevant to learning about USA life.

Description of the Major Groups

We were asked to focus the report on the three major constituent groups, identified by ISAO as "the Venezuelans, the Saudi Arabians, and the Iranians." An initial discussion of how the three major groups came to be in the program is essential for a full understanding of student reactions and problems that occurred, and of problems already resolved before entering orientation.

These participants differed from other students in the Orientation program in that they were sponsored as separate groups by one of three outside agencies. In addition many of them were not new to the U.S. at the time of this program and had already spent varying amounts of time singly or in groupings both in Minneapolis as well as other parts of the U.S. before entering the Orientation program under study.

Venezuelan students are here as part of a program underwritten by their government to increase the nation's resources of individuals with advanced educational skills. Sixty percent of the participants are ruralites recruited from outside the metropolitan area of Caracas. The Institute of International Education in New York is the agency responsible for the group's presence in the U.S. and it is through it that the contractual arrangements were made with the University of Minnesota program. It is IIE's responsibility to assist the individual in finding some institution in the U.S. willing to accept them for matriculation as a student. For many of these students their stay in Minnesota is transitional, a point which adversely affects their interest in being oriented to the specifics of this geographic area. At this point in time (August) many were still being placed. In any case, many, if not most, will not be studying in Minnesota. A history of uncertainties and indecisions about their future is reflected in their reaction to the Program. Most of this group has been here since January participating in the IEL program. Most of this group were quite young.

The Iranian group were participants and present in the U.S. as a result of an arrangement between the Twin City based international company, Control Data, and the government of Iran. The company had agreed to set up four vocational/technical training schools in Iran, including furnishing

trained native staff and providing all necessary equipment to carry out their Control Data training techniques program. To do this it was necessary to train a cadre of individuals in English so that they could in turn adapt Control Data material and methods to Iran. These persons, recruited from the ranks of the Ministry of Education, possessed technical skills which are to be taught in the new schools. In addition, the company also assumed the role of sponsor to another group of highly trained, urbane technocrats from the Ministry of Planning and Budget Organization who were sent to the U.S. with the expectation they would matriculate in U.S. universities to complete advanced degrees in computor informational technology. Thus the Iranian group was composed of two distinct subgroups with distinctly different backgrounds and purposes for participating in the program. Differences arise from methods of selection from these two different government departments. The academic backgrounds, expectations, and socio-economic levels of these students vary and have further complicated matters for ISAO in having these two distinct subsets merged into one program. Many of these participants were mature, experienced individuals.

The participants from Saudi Arabia are here as a result of a contract between Pillsbury International and the Saudi Arabian Government (similar to the contract between Control Data and Iran). The company is to supervise the construction, organize the operation of and train personnel for two flour mills in Saudi Arabia. In order to provide the necessary qualified Saudi Arabian personnel, 25 individuals were brought to the U.S. for training in flour mill production, some as early as September 1974. The students who came were graduates from vocational/technical schools in Saudi Arabia. It was not generally assumed by the sponsors that they were to matriculate

in higher academic education degree programs. However, they needed preparation in English so that they could enter instruction programs in flour milling that take place primarily within the context of academic institutions.

The relationship of the students to the Orientation program thus varied from group to group not only because of individual differences but because of the proximity of the sponsoring agency to the University, purpose in learning English, and such variables as the length of time they had already been present in the U.S. Some were housed in University dormitories, others in private apartments. Much to our surprise some of the Moslem Iranians lived in Souls Harbor, a retirement home housed in a former downtown hotel, operated by a fundamentalist Christian sect. Both Pillsbury and Control Data had local corporate managers assigned to assist their contract students, while those sponsored by IIE depended more heavily on the personal assistance of ISAO personnel.

A persistent problem existed among those who had ostensibly been brought to the U.S. for technical training in that some, if not most, perceived themselves as potential condidates to matriculate in collegiate programs. They spent much of their time attempting to define their status in such a manner by, for example, applying for admission to various collegiate institutions. Other circumstances, sometimes ideosyncratic, should be pointed out such as the desire by a few to use the U.S. experience as an opportunity to immigrate. This limited description is salient in that the reader may well conjecture what the implications are for explaining the varied reactions of the participants of the EL/Orientation program.

The Orientation Program was not aimed exclusively at these three above categories of participants. Included in the total number of participants in the program were persons individually sponsored, from a variety of countries, with a diversity of goals but usually academic, and most of whom were of a more recent arrival.

During the IEL instructional component, the total 168 participants were divided into small sections according to their performance on written test materials. During the ISAO component the three major contract groups we were asked to observe were generally redistributed into three sections based on listening comprehension scores and length of time in the U.S. Each section had a leader drawn from the junior ISAO staff. The remaining miscellaneous group of individually sponsored students comprised two further Orientation sections. Participation in the program varied across these groups; the individually sponsored, most recent arrivals generally had higher levels of attendance than those from the three contract groups.

ISAO Goals

From the onset of our research we attempted to identify the goals of the program. The ISAO program coordinator indicated during an interview four major goals for the program, without specifying a ranking of the order of their importance:

> Providing opportunities for practicing English
>
> Cognitive preparation, a giving of information about American culture by means of lectures
>
> Providing a wide range of experiential learning situations inside and outside the classroom involving customs and life in the U.S.

Building support systems within the group so that students are able to help each other informally

Subsequent to the conclusion of data gathering we were given a further set of goals which were written statements for a separate but somewhat similar program (Orientation for Foreign Students). However, the brochure given to participants of the particular program on which we focused (Intensive English Language and Orientation Program for Foreign Students) made only general mention of orientation activities aimed at acquainting the students with life in the U.S. Although we found similarities among the various sets of objectives contained in USAO materials for Orientation Programs, we did not find any specifically aimed at the type of student we classify as a non-new arrival. As will become apparent to the reader, part of the program's difficulty appeared to be the lack of clear cut goals for students who had already spent varying amounts of time in the U.S.

To provide opportunities for practicing English

For the foreign student, language acquisition is a prerequisite for entering U.S. culture; their need for language proficiency is reflected in their primary concern to master English. An inability to understand the language is often a root cause of their immediate problems. The repercussions and uncertainty from failure to matriculate or successfully compete in the academic scene were frequent themes in our discussions with the students as they discussed non-attendance or apathy towards Orientation activities. It was apparent to us that some student expectations exceeded their present skills, as measured by low scores on written proficiency tests. However, until they master English, they will not gain acceptance or find success in

academic programs. Language is literally the key to successful participation in the aspects of American culture for which they are here. Further, the inability to understand what is being taught or being unable to follow ordinary conversations among Americans lead some students to retreat from full participation in the American scene.

These problems are recognized and are being tackled in various ways in the ISAO programs but it is hoped that the following discussion will serve to emphasize the strategic importance of finding ways to overcome language barriers blocking the student from fuller participation in American society and even in the ISAO activities themselves.

A number of specific problems were identified pertaining to language. Students recognized categories or levels of language usage such as that between everyday basic polite conversational phrases as distinct from technical jargon used in academic fields of study. Further differentiation may be found between formal "correct English" as it is often taught in schools and the informal "slang" which is often unfamiliar to the students. Technical jargon may also be subdivided into that relevant to their specific fields of specialization and that from other disciplines. The student prepared with the jargon of his own field, computer science, for example, is not necessarily prepared to comprehend the sociologist. The following situations typify some major problems.

1. Orientation lectures given to the students often contained complex issues and concepts that they did not understand. The level

of language used was hard to comprehend for a student with only an elementary grasp of the language. Terms used in presenting some of the lecture material in the Orientation Program derived from such disciplines as sociology, anthropology, political science, and industrial relations, and was too difficult to follow, especially for technically oriented students. They complained to group leaders, eventually most indicated their reaction by not coming. Despite attempts by some orientation leaders to make terms explicit, achieved at the expense of interrupting the lecture, very little attempt was made to restructure the material for nonnative speakers of English. There seemed to be great room for improvement in this area of analyzing lectures for vocabulary and adjusting it to the levels of comprehension of the students.

2. Similarly, despite intervention from group leaders, presentation of material was often too rapid. Lecturers when reminded to "speak slowly" would oblige for a while then lapse back into normal tempo of speech. Students would comment to us the vivid impression that the pace was "too fast, too fast."

3. A further difficulty experienced by some students was with styles of American pronunciation which contrasted with the European style they had learned as school English. Several students, speaking to one of the members of the research team from England, commented on the problems they were having with American English accents. Many of them were more accustomed to hearing European pronunciation and the initial difficulty with recognizing speech patterns here. Often the meaning of a sentence can be lost through such subtle changes in the pronunciation of a single word.

These examples of problems which result in constraints on the students' ability to comprehend or to participate in discussions of material presented, illustrate the complaint that insufficient attention to the level of English usage affects their willingness to continue to attend Orientation Programs, suggesting that there is a further conflict between two objectives - cognitive preparation (e.g., providing information) and participation in English language discussions - that has not been resolved. The students' limited powers of comprehension negate ISAO's efforts to provide broader theoretical frameworks for understanding and coping with cultural differences. Unless there is some attempt to match the language levels of the participants with the language level of the materials presented, there will be no dialogue between the two parties, students and staff. In planning for a successful presentation, one must be attentive to the level of vocabulary, so that terms and concepts used will be understood by the students.

In addition cognizance must be given to the students own sense of priorities. The purpose of the ISAO orientation program emphasizes the cognitive aspects of learning about American life but for the participants acquisition of English skills is of overarching importance. Students openly express that primary priority should be given to language acquisition. They generally do not perceive any secondary spin off of further learning of language facility during orientation sessions in which they only minimally understand the content.

An important factor in analyzing the success of the program lies in the methods used by ISAO to convey information across cultural-linguistic boundaries. Whether students perceive the information in

the way it is intended is a function of their ability to comprehend the material on either linguistic or cultural levels. The material (information) ISAO presents while usually interesting and important as content to those individuals who have obtained an advanced level of fluency is usually incomprehensible and deemed unimportant to those not so skilled. However, even for those who may comprehend the vocabulary, it was not always apparent that attention was given to the meaning the content had to the individual - a function not of language fluency but of the culturally determined cognitive framework brought to the situation.

Many students did, however, express a desire to be able to talk about customs in their own countries, to be able to discuss contrasts between different lifestyles, to be able to comment on their impressions of life in America, in short to have more time for discussions and questions. Their statements to us suggest that they felt the flow of information to be oneway and would welcome more opportunity to make Orientation a two-way exchange of information, thus greatly facilitating the primary goal of providing opportunities for practicing English in the ISAO group sessions.

Cognitive Preparation

A major goal of the ISAO Orientation Program is to provide the student with information about American life. This is attempted primarily in the format of a series of afternoon lectures, held from 3:30 to 4:30 pm immediately following the Intensive English Language Program, in which senior staff of ISAO and other experts from either within the University or the community give presentations on topics

ranging from student and family life to industrial relations and mass media. In addition to formal presentations, other methods used to orient students, either directly or indirectly, are role playing exercises, informal discussions and occasional hours wherein the junior staff are on hand to give personal assistance.

The notion of culture as knowledge supports the rationale for a cognitive preparation of students by equipping them with conceptual frameworks with which to view American culture. A culture consists of sets of rules for behavior which an individual must learn if he is to fit into the norms of any society. In our informal discussions with the students we found evidence that they were aware of the need for knowing these rules, for having a cognitive map to guide them in their interactions and participation in American life. Students have experienced states of shock as a result of inadequate preparation at the cognitive level. A student from the Middle East who persisted in his custom of warmly hugging a male friend as a "natural" way of greeting him, told us of his chagrin on finding that two males embracing was disapproved of here. One Iranian informant expressed this cognitive need by requesting information about laws and morals here.

> "I think the main idea of the program is good. I ask questions about customs of the Americans I know, but some students they don't ask...maybe we need information in different areas. For example, we should know about the <u>laws</u> here. What is wrong and what is right. For example, they teach students in High School here <u>law</u>, what they should do, should not do. We need to understand the <u>laws</u> of the Americans here."

Clearly he was not limiting his meaning of the word law to a legalistic one, but included the more informal meanings which we commonly refer to as customs and etiquette.

An example of one information giving approach on a facet of American life was demonstrated by the director of the ISAO program in a lecture in the U.S. Key terms used in the presentation were clearly displayed on the board and a detailed framework was given upon which students entering the University could base their future contacts with academic advisors. Detailed information was given on topics such as grade point averages and students were informed of the necessity for constructing a balanced program of courses. The student comprehending this material would not have a false expectation of the role of advisors; he would understand what is required of him to do. With a description of the rules governing social behaviors in settings on campus, outlined and illustrated, the student now possesses a cognitive map and is equipped with some of the basic rules he needs to follow as he moves out into interactions with the bureaucracy in the larger academic scene.

Another approach to cognitive preparation of participants was to involve them in informal discussions on topics and themes in American life. An example of this mode of presentation was observed where a guest faculty member, in an informal discussion on American family life, raised general issues by relating aspects of the organization, decision making processes, roles and sharing of domestic work among his own family. Students were encouraged to ask questions and several commented at length about the similarities and differences with their own family patterns.

In both of the above approaches information was imparted and the format or style of presentation was attentive to the needs of the students concerning development of English language proficiency, such

as learning new words or practicing sentence drills.

However, the emphasis on skills practiced in each of these examples was significantly different. In the former, the emphasis was on content and vocabulary while in the latter the emphasis was on usage through speech patterning activities. Students were encouraged to articulate their ideas and share with the class information about their background and how this was similar or contrasted with American customs. This latter mode allowed the discussion leader to monitor how the information was being received by the students. It also facilitates comparison and possible integration of the new knowledge with what the student brings from his own culture.

Some of the students complained that the material presented to them was now too elementary. It was "uninteresting" or "would have been useful when we first arrived; but not now that I know it." If ISAO is to continue to service students who are not new-arrivals, the evidence clearly suggests that it will need to revise the content of its Program such that is substantially differs from the information useful to a new arrival. Many of these activities were at a level too simple for the students as the following examples show:

> "Some lectures - they do not ask the professors what to prepare. The (ISAO) do not ask the students what they want to do. I have been introduced to the IDS tower three times, yet because I live in Souls Harbor, I go there everyday to shop. I would like to have more advanced lectures about American music, art and paintings."

This student did not know enough about the more mundane aspects of his request. He did not know where the museums and art galleries are, or where concerts take place. It is recognized that this per-

ceived duplication is not always soley the result of actions on the part of the ISAO component as other agencies (MIC, for example) are also involved in the total program. However, from the participants point of view these jurisdictional boundaries are not apparent and they generally perceived the program as a totality. The accuracy of this students accusation is perhaps open to question in that ISAO does ask for student imput into topics and methods of the program. However, the frequency of such complaints would indicate a problem of communication between students and staff exists. In what form are these requests made? A written notice handed out in the English classes may meet the criteria of a pro forma request, but it produces few responses of the kind required. This is especially critical for attempting to communicate with the individuals who, for whatever reason, rarely attended the orientation sessions.

Students in their conversations with us often revealed areas where they did not possess extensive cognitive maps...where there were still gaps in their knowledge. Many, even after lengthy stays in this country, were still perplexed about how to make friends with Americans. As one informant admitted:

> "People come to our apartment, once, twice, then you don't hear from them again. I didn't do anything impolite or anything bad to cause this. Are Americans friendly to us? Yes and no."

Other areas mentioned were a need for more information on "driving licenses, tests, and on the freeway system in the Twin Cities."

A major question asked of the research team by ISAO officials was to inquire into reasons behind the pattern of low attendance in

Orientation activities. We talked with the students about this and found they were very frank and explicit as why they had not attended many sessions; many spoke out of a sense of frustration and exasperation with the program; and the following points were repeatedly emphasized: Tiredness, not interesting, need to study, conflicts with IEL homework assignments, conflicts with library schedule. The following are a sample of reasons given:

> "I attended three - but I was too tired."

Probing further revealed several sources of fatigue.

> "I have long distances to travel between classes. In one day I find myself crossing from the East Bank to the West Bank three times. Plus I have a lot of homework to do."

Most students had little hesitation in telling us why they were too tired to attend. Their basic claim was that their days were very full with English classes.

> D implied that the program is too intensive. He wants a longer program than seven weeks. This is too short. "Everyday they give me one hundred new words," he said, "I look for them in the dictionary, but that is very slow. I learn maybe ten. I want to learn English." he said with conviction, "but in the afternoon I fall asleep."

Others stressed, "I have too much work to do."

> "They say we study English five hours a day - but it's twenty-four hours a day. We never stop."

> "There is no time. We have many classes. There is not time even for questions."

The English language classes are described as "intensive." From talking with the students and observing them in a variety of settings at different hours of the day and evening, it is apparent that an in-

tensive program makes critical demands on the powers of concentration such that they are predictably mentally tired, and in need of a change of pace. Similarly the often long distances between classes, and the long day spent in classrooms meant that many of the students were also physically tired. Breaks between morning classes often gave students only time for a hurried dash between classes. Many were often observed arriving late and if the student wanted a break for something, i.e. refreshment or going to the toilet this meant cutting time out from the next class. The seven weeks of the intensive English program require such an almost full time preoccupation with completing homework assignments and preparing term papers and speech presentations that other events suffer. For an understanding of the dilemma that forces a student to cut Orientation classes, we also draw on our own experiences as participants in the daily round of classes prior to the Orientation Program held at 3:30. (We too were exhausted at that time.)

This perhaps is a criticism which can only be appreciated from the inside. Faced with dwindling numbers attending Orientation activities the result of hours of careful planning, time and investment of people and money, it was a natural reaction for the senior ISAO staff to suggest ways of disciplining students into attending. But our experience was that ISAO were not dealing with the effects of five hours of Intensive English language work on the students' powers of concentration, especially as only a ten minutes was allowed between the end of the last IEL class at 3:20 and the suggested time of commencement of ISAO lectures at 3:30. By 3:30 we, too, had had enough of sitting in classes, listening, writing, learning. Given even the most perfect ISAO program in content, preparation, analysis for language difficulty or style of

presentation, the following objections will not be overcome:

> "I attended three, but did not find them useful. I want to learn English. But they are wasteful of my time. I can learn more outside the program now than in it."

There was this overriding factor of fatigue which has important implications for the time and place of ISAO Programs as a sub-component of a larger system. It would appear that the solution of many students to their place of American life was to import a cross-cultural remedy, the late afternoon siesta - by 4:30 many of them were home in apartments and dorms sleeping. Later they would pick up again and do their homework. Their statements on tiredness matched what we observed.

These comments are not intended to question the premises on which the IEL programs are built. Rather they are made to point out the consequences of a commitment to an "intensive" program. Time expectations, whether realistic or not we are unprepared to say, are made by the IEL program. Based upon their own sense of priorities, students give preference to the acquisition of English. As a consequence, the student placed in a situation with competing demands for his time and attention opts to fulfill the demands of the IEL program.

Another interesting facet of non-attendance was the conflict with the hours of the University library. In the latter part of Orientation after the summer school recess, the libraries restricted their hours from 9 to 5 and were closed weekends. This meant that if students were to collect resource material for their papers and assignments, or use the resources to work on homework, the time between 3:30 and 5:00 was required elsewhere. This point was only realized when during a round of interviewing, two students in the sample were expressing concern

that we leave time for them to hurry to the library before it closes or that we meet them on their return after 5:00. The implications for the timing of ISAO are clear, the Program was inadvertently in conflict with the students' needs to be elsewhere for very legitimate reasons and out of a concern with their major priority, English.

The implications are also clear as to the physical setting within which ISAO activities were held. There was little contrast in the institutional surroundings in the daily English classes and the ISAO sessions. Even though they physically moved to another building the tired students were faced with the problem of attending more lectures in a sterile classroom setting.

We are well aware solutions often beget unanticipated problems and are hesitant to make suggestions which may lead to yet more unforseen consequences. A change in timing of lectures could predictably clash with the needs of students to return to their host families, many were often leaving campus around 5:30 for long distances of journeys by bus out to the remoter suburbs. It would seem that ISAO needs to review its program in the context of a larger system of which it is but a part so that the students are not unintentionally caught in dilemmas to which no satisfactory solution can be found. The evidence suggests that the program as presently construed does contain a number of dilemmas for the students such that his choices as to what to do with his time are adversely affecting ISAO attendance record.

Experiential Learning Situations

The Orientation program contains a number of activities which might be classified under the rubric, experiential learning. We have

chosen to examine in detail only the Home Stay program partially because some other kinds of such experiences are discussed in other sections of this report. More importantly, however, Home Stays were the most frequently volunteered topic when we asked students our general questions about the Orientation program. This response may well be a function of the fact that more students participated in the Home Stay program than in the formal afternoon daily presentations and discussions. On the whole the reaction to the Home Stay program was quite positive. An analysis of this program is made in some detail because it explicates both the potentials for cognitive and linguistic learning as well as the problems which informal and unstructured situations present. In addition we shall point to a latent function emerges through a usage for purposes for which it is not manifestly intended, tiding students over in periods of financial difficulty.

Students are placed with American families for varying periods of time as part of their ISAO Orientation to American life. An analysis of their responses to questions in this area revealed criteria for assessing how the foreign students judge a Home Stay to be "successful" and a few pointers as to what factors or conditions make the Home Stay to be perceived as useful and enjoyable.

A part of the benefits of staying with a host family are directly related to the students' expressed concerns of wanting situations in which to practice the language. Students reported that they get accustomed to hearing the accent and quickly learn the colloquial phrases including slang expressions frequently used by Americans.

While for some the period of time of a Home Stay was limited to brief visits, others lived with their host families while attending ses-

sions at the University. This meant that they were living out in the community and traveling in for classes. The Home Stay had added a new dimension to their understanding of life here by allowing many to obtain a perspective other than an academic or campus oriented one. The unexpectedness of the experiential learning was illustrated by the anecdote of the foreign student who gleefully replied,

> "I learned many things. I learned how to cook American food!"

Thus the experience on many ways was seen as an excellent preparation for living as an American.

Students, when questioned on how the actual experience had matched their expectations of how Americans live, revealed that they were pleasantly surprised by what they had seen. An Iranian student commented that he was very surprised to find some American customs and attitudes were very similar to those in his own country. He had visited a family in a smaller Minnesota town and had been struck by the strict views held by the family. He explained that they were very conservative in outlook and condemned teenagers who wore jeans. The student, extremely well tailored in dress himself, had liked this. "Their customs were similar to mine." He compared them to Persian attitudes toward change. The above illustrates clearly a point that may often be overlooked in cross cultural programs where the emphasis is more on differences than on similarities. Home Stays may cause the student to reflect on the similar customs, experience and unexpected delight that life is not so different here after all, and help ease the transition into living in the U.S.

This case also serves to illustrate how dramatically foreign students' attitudes towards Americans can be shaped by the Home Stay exper-

ience. This potential effect on student attitudes demonstrates the need of a careful meshing of the program to ensure that families selected are matched to the proper students. A case in point is with the student who found himself living with a young couple who were (to his intense distress) unmarried. Questions arising from situations like this concern the degree to which students can be exposed to new situations, and on what the effects are on the student. A partial solution would seem to make sure that there is a "back-up" support system for the student for him to air his views on what he sees and experiences. In this case, he told of his experience in one of the Orientation discussion sessions. Would it not be advisable for the students in Home Stay programs to get together as a group to share experiences under the direction of a group leader so that they could see the diversity present in American family life? Could students be assigned to families with similar (or at least minimally divergent) value orientations in areas of deeply held moral beliefs? Can families be screened and sensitized to recognize the inherent problems in these differences?

The Home Stay program is perceived by most as an effective way to meet students' expressed concerns to have more contact with Americans. But the concern is often to have more contact with Americans of the same age as the students. This point is illustrated in the comments of a student who said his host family were very nice, <u>good</u> people, but that after a few days he did not find they had much in common that they could talk about. Conversation he felt was becoming a bit strained. The situation with the same family would have been greatly improved if they had children of around school leaving or college age with whom he could interact more comfortably. The factor here was not different customs but

different age levels. This point is especially critical for younger foreign students. One student mentioned that he was not going to go to his host family for the weekend.

> "They want to know someone from another country... but old people think differently. Venezuelans are impulsive, extrovert."

He wanted contact with a group of younger people (he was about 19 himself), get to know a group, then make friends. With older people he feels uncomfortable. Communication was artificial, not relaxed. His discomfort interacting with Americans would be minimized by introducing him to youth groups with whom he could play sports and interact freely. Despite the above criticisms of wanting contact with younger Americans, the students seemed to like the idea of staying with host families but not all having been provided with one.

Several times in response to the question, "Do you have a host family?" we were told "no". The student had asked for one, but was told there were not enough families to go around. This was confirmed by the ISAO staff in that they had not been able to match every student up this year due to the extra large numbers of students in the program, and that preference had been given over the agency sponsored students to the privately sponsored ones. One student seemed disappointed that there had been no contact arranged and was trying to make efforts to live with an American family by renting a room. We would question if the contracting agencies, Control Data and Pillsbury do not have an obligation to assist in this facet of the orientation program.

Host Families and Cross Cultural Strain.

The ISAO recognized the problem of contact with host families unrelieved by periods away from them, so in planning for a weekend of activ-

ities, it was acknowledged that even those students with host families might like to join in. Families did not always plan special events for special holidays (e.g. Labor Day, a vacation day on campus) and that the families might like a "privacy break," or the student a break from the family. This point received independent confirmation from a student who confided that he liked his host family, but not "seven days a week". He would like to have a family for weekends but did not know if he could cope with having to live there in the week and fulfill all the homework requirements for the IEL course.

One extreme case was that of a Saudi Arabian student who was afraid even to make contact with Americans. When he talked about host families as a way of overcoming his fears, he said he "hesitated" because he does not know how to act.

During the ISAO Orientation Sessions the staff instruct the students on the host family experience. Most of the students understand that the host families are instructed to accept differences and are prepared to help them adjust. But the fearful student mentioned above, who would probably have benefitted most from an experience family showing him the ropes, declined apologetically for not participating as he is extremely "sensitive" about being laughed at. This student was not attending the Orientation Program sessions due to "pressures of work" and so had missed "orientation to family life" lectures. Some of the Home Stays were for shorter periods of time of a weekend stay. There were however students who did not get to know of this option due to difficulties the ISAO staff had in ensuring that information reached the students.

Problems of Selection Criteria

Although we have suggested some broad guidelines for selection of

students, for this non-family component several additional factors seem to be further complicating the issue. One problem has been that students who were having severe economic problems, were given priority in assignments to host families. For example, those unsure of their placement in University programs for the fall had to relinquish their rooms in the dorms as students arrived who had contracts for the academic year. (During the summer a larger percentage of foreign students are housed there as a temporary measure on arrival until they relocate.) One option that appeared economically sound was to seek host family assignment. The staff were aware that in some cases an expectation was being set up that those students "out of money" or having to move out of the dorms would be placed with host families. However overt this expectation may have been, one could not be sure if the application to go to a host family arose out of a genuine desire on the part of the student to participate in a learning experience or because of a financial motivation. In ISAO's efforts to help students in these situations it did appear to us that economic factors could be the basis for making such arrangements. Whatever the motive for participation, the situation would seem to indicate the need for a careful orientation of the host families into the program so that no false impressions were given out of an overly idealistic nature of reasons for student participation.

The above remarks are not intended to detract the staff from what is a very important component in their program but to share with the reader some of the complexities that solutions cause, when people from varying backgrounds are placed in such intimate contacts. We are convinced that the good points far out-weigh any of the flaws in the operation of the program, but that these flaws need to be reviewed from time to time

in an attempt to eliminate them from an otherwise sound component.

Building Support Systems with the Group

A fourth goal of the ISAO Orientation program was to build a support system within the group, through which students are able to help each other to informally build a group spirit. We took this goal to mean that Orientation groups have a potential to tap resources that exist within a peer group of foreign students for mutual help in solving problems of adjustment. In addition we took this goal to be that through a variety of informal means it is possible to structure situations so that mutual interdependences would emerge. Thus part of our focus addressed the question as to whether the formal Orientation activities were noticeably contributing to the formation of informal support groups or if these activities in themselves were leading to the development of social networks operating outside the context of the Orientation hour.

It was not our impression that the structure of group activities, as presently conceived and organized, did much to effectively develop student rapport or to build up much group spirit or identity. Our observations revealed that groups did emerge but they did so outside the program, primarily along cultural and linguistic lines. It was within these networks that effective information sharing took place and patterns of attitudes and actions were shaped. Any consistent groupings that emerged as a result of IEL/Orientation activities were almost invariably the outgrowth of an individual's placement with the five hour English language program. These groupings were most visible in such activities as going to lunch or traveling across campus to classes. But even here they continued to be most often subsets based upon common linguistic traits. We saw little, if any, evidence to suggest that students maintained any sort of contact or evidenced mutual support activities based upon their

placement in the Orientation group. As has been apparent in other sections of this report, many of ISAO's problems in not realizing its goals stemmed from the failure to deal with the issue of overlap and competition between IEL and ISAO components. We are all well aware of the difficulties in bridging these programs to utilize the inherent strengths of each, but until the issue is squarely faced, much energy and activity that currently takes place will remain unfruitful.

As it is presently structured we would concur in the advisability of a change in pace, style and setting within the Orientation hour in order for it to achieve a modicum of success. However, as a basis for building support groups the program is ineffective because it ignores naturally occurring groupings. It was our observation that social networks among the students emerged on basis of common nationality, language, residence (in the Twin Cities), and time in the U.S. In addition, some of these networks had further cross cutting ties based upon subtle and not so subtle social stratifications existing in the home country.

A common task to be solved was that of completing English homework assignments. Frequently we encountered students studying together. However, the basis of this common interaction was not only on their common membership in an English section but also their common residence (which in turn was a function of common nationality). For example from the field notes made on a Sunday afternoon,

> "We knocked on his door (at Cedars 94)..again much evidence of work going on, books scattered around on the coffee table and couches, dictionaries and textbooks open and obviously in constant use, notebooks piled up.....Both had obviously been studying at the coffee table with opened English language textbooks. While I interviewed Hassan, his roommate resumed his study alone."

There appeared to be a reluctance on the part of ISAO utilize, even though they may recognize, the existence of what we have called natural groupings. Based upon our discussions with ISAO personnel and observation of their interactions with students, we would suspect this is partially a product of unrecognized ethnocentric biases towards egalitationism in American society, this is then reflected in the approach of the ISAO team. This is part of a larger problem of the program itself being "culture bound." The dilemma is one of establishing criteria as to the degree which ISAO must suspend its own expression of dominant culture values in order to establish contact with students as they attempt to acculturate them to American life. Much of the literature describing planned culture change documents the difficulty of accomplishing this essential component.

Communication with the participants, for example, was acknowledged to be a problem for the program as students sometimes gave inaccurate addresses, telephone numbers or moved from place to place without notifying the program. Since few appeared for the afternoon orientation program, this was not an effective information disseminating source. The IEL staff was reluctant to devote much of their teaching time to carrying out informational activities about the ISAO program. The American solution was to distribute volumes of duplicated flyers. Another approach which could have been used with more frequency , and one which we found effective in locating informants, was to seek out individuals by going to the various major residence areas and passing the word that we were seeking someone. Usually this is effective, although we were not always aware of the social linkages involved as the information was passed among

them. Venezuelans could usually be found through someone in the dormitory and Iranians through friends in Souls Harbor or Cedars 94.

The effectiveness of this communications network was acknowledged by Control Data officials who expressed amazement, if not admiration, over the way information and rumor quickly circulated. "I would not be surprised if the content of this interview would not be known to all of them by tomorrow morning."

A built-in contradiction to organizing and utilizing orientation sections as support systems is that many of the students have been present in the U.S. for long periods of time. As we have documented elsewhere (Hendricks and Skinner, 1972) foreign students, by the nature of the adaptive problems they must solve (especially when they are present in groups rather than as isolates), are cliquish. Some of those participating in the program had been here in the U.S. and even in Minneapolis as long as 12 months. The nature of the information they needed and wanted was quite different from that of those who were newly arrived.

> "His (a Venezuelan) reasons for not attending were stated quite bluntly. "One day last week the topic was 'How I spend a morning in the U.S.' Ridiculous! We have been here since January and spent many mornings." Rather than attend such orientation topics, he had decided that his time could be better spent by going home and sleeping after his English classes. "Why not have orientation in January when we came?"

Such a topic was not offered by the ISAO orientation program but may have been in the English program. Regardless of the accuracy, this is the perception and reaction of at least one participant. Be it based upon false information or mere rationalization it represents the kind of suppositions upon which a good many of our informants operated.

The degree that an adaptation has already taken place was apparent in the visiting any of a number of apartments in Cedars 94 where many Iranians live, recreating a life style which is an amalgam of Americanisms and Iranianisms. Our attention was also directed to one student by fellow Saudi Arabians who they said was attending the orientation sessions because "he needs to." In our interview with him, we asked if he might be homesick.

> "Homesick? I've never left home. I live with Arab friends. I eat Arabic food, listen to Arabic music. (In essence) I have not left the Middle East since the I arrived here."

He is cushioned from the traumatic effects of culture shock by living in an Arabic atmosphere. As he says, the only way for him to know if he has adjusted would be to live away from all this atmosphere. As a strict Moslem he now has advice on what meats to buy, which drinks are non-alcoholic. Because he is shy and sensitive, it seems unlikely that he will move out from the comfort of this circle. Voluntary participation in the Home Stay program was ruled out by him for fear of making a linguistic or cultural mistake.

Conclusion

This report has been somewhat negative in tone partly as a result of the issues we were asked to address. We hasten to acknowledge many positive aspects such as in the countless hours that staff members spent in attempting to assist and reconcile divergent demands placed upon them by the participants, the institution, the sponsoring agencies, and an uneasy relationship with the IEL program.

Many of the problems encountered are a result of the ad hoc nature

of the program as it mushroomed from 45 to 168 within a short period of time. Some of the problems resulted from the range of differences within the participants which made an accommodation to their various needs impossible to adequately meet. Other problems were really outside the scope of ISAO's control, the selection process and various individual motivations for participation within even a single grouping.

We would, however, strongly urge that if the program is to be continued, serious study be given the implications of including contract groups whose motivation for participation is often quite different than those individuals exclusively bound for entrance into U.S. institutions of higher education. It appeared to us that at least one of the major stumbling blocks was that of using a program model built on the experiences of previous programs. Most of the participants we interviewed found the content too simplistic or at minimum oriented towards problems for which they had already worked out tenable solutions. It is obvious that presently the orientation program does not attract wide attendance nor participation. One suggestion has been to resort to various sanctions for non-attendance. This is a move we feel would be counter productive. We would suggest, however, in addition to revision of both its content and style of presentation, that serious effort be given to finding a time slot that does not place the program invariably at the end of a long arduous day.